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Study material for B.A Part-1
(Honours)

Contemporary American
literature

- Contemporary American literature is subversive. It contains an element of the surreal, bizarre names, plots and consistent, biting commentary.
- Primarily postmodernist, these works are inherently distrustful. They not only question cultural inconsistencies, they allow such inconsistencies to naturally unfold within the narrative.
- As a result, contemporary American literature, arguably continues the pattern of highly-politicized fiction popularised in the 18th and 19th century, along with the thought-provoking

philosophical questions of 20th century
Modernist movement.

Characteristics of the Contemporary American Literature

While researching the meaning of contemporary American literature, we found that all literature considered to be contemporary because authors usually write about the world around them. In regards of this project a more precise meaning is needed.

You can say that literary works done after World War II are contemporary literature. Thereby, we need to keep in mind: "The efforts made to classify and define contemporary American literature have been incomplete at best. These difficulties lie in part because of the literature's close proximity to modern

readers; we are still in the process of reading and writing contemporary American work.” Some aspects we noticed about contemporary American literature were that they have input or deal with immigrants or descendants of them, women issues, technological matters and how they are woven into the American culture.

Themes

Identity

With increasing globalization, intersections of cultures and more vocal discussions of women's rights and LGBT rights, identity has become a common theme in 21st century literature. In a world that is now able to exchange ideas more quickly than ever before via the Internet and other technological advancements, people have relatively more freedom to draw

from multiple cultures and philosophies and question the concept of the self and its relation to the body, brain and "soul." For example, Sam Clay in "The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay" by Michael Chabon struggles to come to terms with his homosexuality.

History and Memory

As contemporary readers are able to look back on history and see how history has been depicted differently for different audiences, history and memory have become themes in 21st century literature. Often contemporary literature explores the notion of multiplicities of truth and acknowledges that history is filtered through human perspective and experience. For example, "The March"

by E.L. Doctorow fictionalizes yet still depicts the realities of General Sherman's famous march during the U.S.

Technology

Today, technology is more integrated into people's lives than ever before. Dreams of what technology could potentially help people become and anxieties regarding the demise of humanity as a result of technology can be seen in 21st Century literature. On one hand, there are books about biotechnology helping people with disabilities, such as "Machine Man" by Max Barry. Additionally, many 21st century works of literature explore what it means when all of humanity's experiences are filtered through technology.

Intertextuality

In postmodern style, many contemporary writers recognize a piece of work as being one among many throughout history.

As such, many writers purposely include acknowledgements, references or parallels to other works of fiction, recognizing their place in a larger, broader conversation, context and body of work. Some intertextual themes go as far as to poke fun at a work's own lack of originality or the clichés that it seemingly cannot escape.

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